

Eli Pepper's Celebration

And How They Put a Damper on His Ambitious Spirit

By CLARISSA MACKIE
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The old home week committee met in Eli Pepper's little grocery store on the night before the celebration was to begin. As chairman of the committee Eli had presided despotically over his fellow townsmen, and it was with something very like relief that the committee contemplated the dawning of the celebration, for that meant the beginning of the end of Eli's self imposed tyranny.

Eli Pepper had been the leading spirit in the old home week project. He was who had slyly planted the germ of the idea in the heads of his neighbors. He had talked loudly of the dollars that would roll into the coffers of the merchants, of the free advertising that their village would receive, of waste land that would be sold to admiring visitors once they had set foot on the picturesque environs of Blue Mills.

All the arrangements were concluded now. Subcommittees of every sort had been appointed until there remained not one respectable citizen of Blue Mills who was not serving in some capacity. Diplomacy possessed diplomacy, but his cupidity was greater than in the end proved his downfall.

Eli Pepper as chairman of the committee assumed charge of all the arrangements, hiring a band from Milton, organizing a parade of prominent citizens (with Eli Pepper in the lead, of course), getting up a program of field sports, tub races, greased pole contests, etc.—until some suspicious party hinted that this sudden exhibition of executive ability on the part of Eli Pepper could have been produced only after months of deep scheming. When they realized this fact the members of the committee waxed bitter, and dissension stalked in their midst. The fact that Eli Pepper had obtained the agency for a Milton firm of decorators and every blue Millsite



"I'M A PLAIN AMERICAN CITIZEN, I AM," who did not own flags or bunting was compelled to employ Eli Pepper to decorate his store front was an added grievance. Indeed, it might have been said that this fact was the last straw that broke their camel's back of patience.

And so on this warm July evening the old home week committee met for the last time in Eli Pepper's grocery store. All enthusiasm in the project had died out, and there was even animosity displayed because they had been stirred from their rut of summer somnolence.

"I guess that's about all," declared Eli Pepper from his seat on the counter. "Everything is ready now, and if the gentlemen of the reception committee will be at the station to meet Congressman Kelzer tomorrow morning."

"What train?" interrupted one of the gentlemen aforesaid in a sulken tone. "Ten-fifty-two," said Eli in a displeased tone. "Of course I don't reckon you know anything about parliamentary rulings, Jake Fleming, but you didn't oughter interrupt me that way."

"I don't want to know anything about parliamentary rules," was Mr. Fleming's disdainful retort. "This here is a free country, and you can't come any English political talk over me. Eli Pepper! I'm a plain American citizen, I am, and I won't be drove by no English sympathizer! You put down congressional rules and I'll be the first man to live up to 'em if I prove of 'em!"

"Jake's right, Eli," remarked William Bolling heavily. "You didn't oughter set up any furfin ideas in any of our heads. There's another generation coming up, and you best not interfere with their—their rights as citizens of these United States!" He looked around for approval and was gratified by several smiling nods.

"You've stirred up trouble," grumbled

Henry Staples from his seat on the doorstep.

"Stirred up trouble!" ejaculated the astonished Mr. Pepper, kicking his heels excitedly against the counter. "Why if it hadn't been for me there wouldn't have been no old home week!"

"That's what I mean," returned Henry Staples sourly, and he arose and went away.

Silently the other members of the committee followed his example until at last Eli Pepper was left alone in his store staring in chagrin at the last departing slouching form.

"Great Heck! I'd like to know what's come into them fellows!" he muttered as he pried up the top of the pickle keg, which he had securely nailed before the committee meeting. "I s'pose they're jealous because I've had ginger enough to scrape a little commission here and there. They'll forget all about it tomorrow when Congressman Kelzer gets here and all the crowd."

Where the crowd was coming from Eli Pepper had not calculated. He had announced that a crowd would be there, and he had expected that neighboring villages would hasten forth to participate in Blue Mills' old home week celebration and spend their dollars in that enterprising community. That these villages might be as somnolent as Blue Mills desired to be, if it had not been for Eli Pepper, he did not consider.

He whistled cheerfully as he bustled about his store prying up the cautiously fastened covers of cracker boxes, cheese case, prune boxes and so forth, until the long room was tidily ready for business in the morning.

Many eyes watched Eli Pepper that night as he went about the closing of his store. They saw him open the closed boxes that should have offered refreshments, they saw him come outside and put up all the wooden shutters that securely closed his windows against intrusion. These were barred outside and in and went all around the long low wooden building even to the part that bachelor Eli used as living apartments. In the bedroom shutters were circular holes cut to admit air at night. Otherwise the place was as securely shuttered and barred as if it were a bank instead of a grocery store.

At last Eli went within, and the outside wooden door was closed behind him, and the faint pencils of light that shone through chinks in the shutters disappeared. It was so quiet around the corner store that they could hear Eli winding his alarm clock in the bedroom and they could see two round yellow globes of light on the ground where the lamplight shot through the holes in his shutter. Then the yellow globes died out and all was still.

It was not until Eli Pepper gave vent to regular orchestral announcement that the lurking members of the old home week committee put their plans in operation. Henry Staples put the situation rudely:

"He's snoring to beat the band now," he whispered to his companions. "Come on now."

Stealthily they went, bearing the heavy iron bars that belonged to the wooden shuttered lockup on the hillside. Quietly they removed Eli's wooden bars and replaced them with the iron ones, and when the iron bars gave out they pieced out the shutters with crowbars, and in the front of the store they boldly nailed the shutters fast. The front and back doors were treated likewise, and when they had finished Eli Pepper, chairman of the old home week committee and leading spirit of the village of Blue Mills, was as securely locked up as if he had been in the lockup on the hillside.

"It's a good thing there's plenty to eat in there and that Eli's used to getting his own meals," chuckled Henry Staples as they stole away.

"He's got everything to make him happy," grunted William Bolling. "He won't have to nail up no pickle barrels or cracker boxes for a week."

"We can look in the winter every night after he's in bed and see if he's well," added Jake Fleming, subduing any uneasiness he might have felt.

"Did you get that sign on the door all right?" asked William Bolling.

"Of course!" snapped Staples. "It says that Eli Pepper is suddenly called away and won't return till after old home week is over." I dropped a note through the hole in the shutter telling him he was to stay there while we run this old home week business. I guess he'll try to push himself as a leading citizen after this."

"I expect he'll have the law on us," remarked William Bolling heavily.

"He don't know who done it," retorted his companions.

The next day Congressman Kelzer delivered an oration to the people of Blue Mills. They listened tolerantly to his discourse, and when he had departed they told each other they'd much rather hear the minister talk. They paraded the village streets to the admiration of their own kin, for no outsiders braved the insufferable heat to come forth and spend their money in Blue Mills. At the end of three days all attempt at a celebration had died out, and the merchants took down their decorations and resumed their accustomed seats on their doorsteps.

Then they prudent set about to release Eli Pepper from his enforced seclusion.

"I'll have the law on ye!" he shouted furiously at his liberators.

William Bolling stepped forward heavily.

"You shut up, Eli Pepper, or we'll have the law on you for a malcontent and dangerous to the peace and happiness of this here village."

Thus Blue Mills planted her foot heavily on the iconoclastic rule of Eli Pepper and went back to the somnolent content of her quiet days.

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NOTICE.

Notice is hereby given that the Commissioners of Assessors have filed with the Town Clerk their official final reports, maps and assessments of the whole costs and expenses in the matter of the following improvements, and the same are now open to inspection of those in interest:

Laying out, opening, straightening, extending and widening of Hoffman boulevard.

Notice is also given that the Bloomfield Town Council at a regular meeting held February 5th, 1912, directed and ordered the Bloomfield Town Council at a regular meeting held February 5th, 1912, at eight o'clock in the Bloomfield Council Chamber, National Bank Building, Bloomfield, as the same was planned when the same was proposed, that the same will meet to consider any objections which may be filed in writing to the aforesaid reports, maps and assessments.

By order of the Town Council:

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